Joseph Stocker

Blind Man's Business

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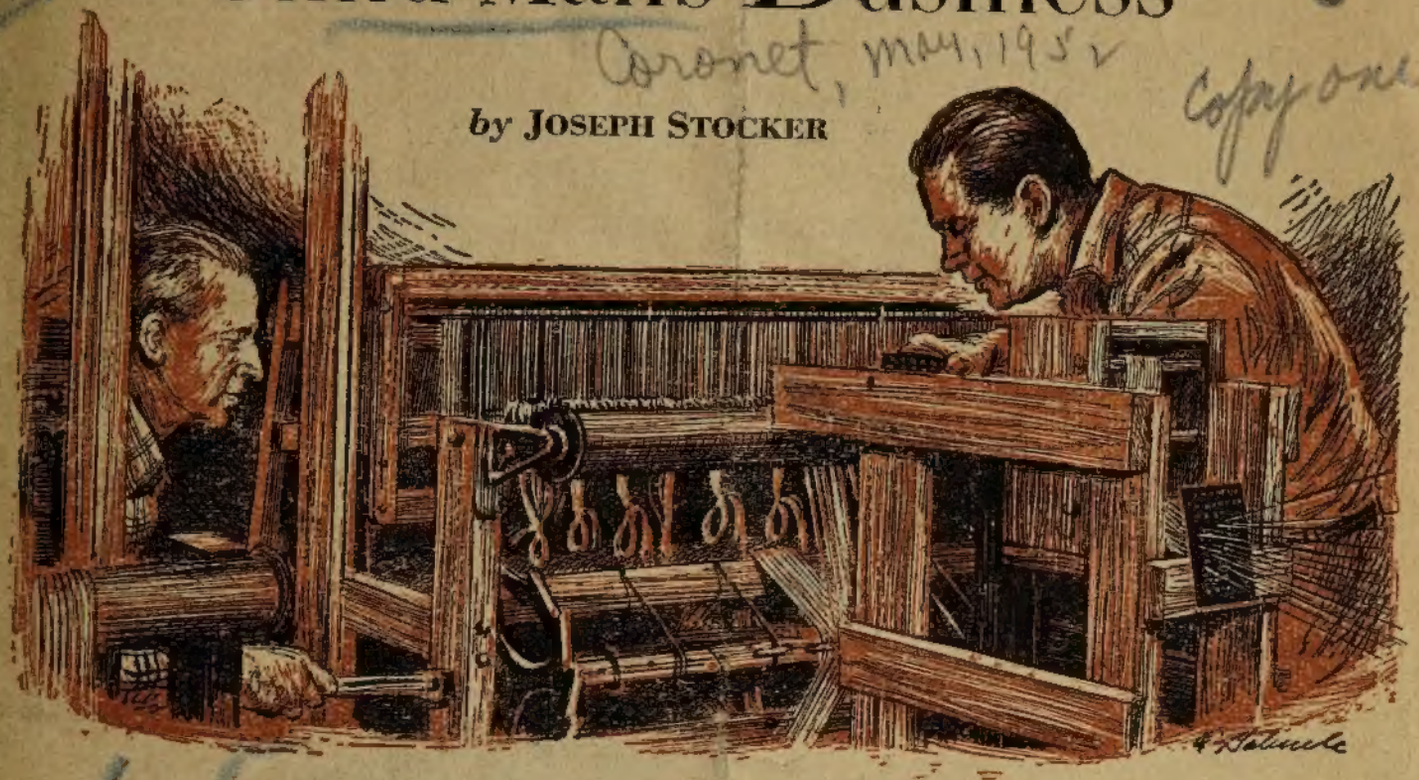
Blind Man's Business

by JOSEPH STOCKER



WITH APPROPRIATE ceremony, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce recently presented the two proprietors of a modest-sized manufacturing plant with a scroll proclaiming their accomplishments "one of the most inspiring success stories in the history of Los Angeles commerce."

Had the Chamber not printed the citation both in type and in Braille, the two partners—David H. Strelow and John L. Bauer—would not have been able to read it. Both are blind. So are all but four of their 31 employees at Blind Industries of California.

Starting with a meager $1,200 in capital, Strelow and Bauer have built Blind Industries into a wholly self-supporting business, grossing $125,000 a year. Their sightless workers turn out rugs, doormats, ironing-board covers, hot pads, and some 40 other items for homes, businesses, and industrial plants—these products selling in open competition with the output of factories run by normal men and women.

The two partners, who have never seen each other, set twin goals when they embarked on their unique enterprise five years ago: first, to earn a living for themselves and their families; second, to give blind people a chance to support themselves in dignity and self-respect.

Dave Strelow, a handsome, mop-haired man of 39, is general manager of Blind Industries. His square, sturdy build suggests that he once may have been a football player. He was—and lost his sight from a gridiron injury when he was 16. At 22, Strelow was totally blind.

John Bauer handles the production end of the business. Fifty-one years old, short, wiry, and droll-humored, he became blind in 1928 when a metal wedge struck him in the eye while he was working in a West Coast steel plant. After a few

way to the great man's table. "Hi pal, remember me?" For a moment the old-timer's heart sank, then one of Broadway's biggest producers smiled and shook hands. "Great to see you, old fellow. Sit down, have a drink. What's on your mind?"

"Well, sir," the old-timer started, "I've been out of the picture lately. Little chest trouble. So while I'm between engagements, I've been writing this book on the old days of vaudeville. Now I'm selling advertising space in it, and I thought you'd want to be included."

While the old-time hoofer held his breath, the producer reached for his checkbook and said, "Sure thing! Put me down for a half page. How much is it?"

"Fifty dollars," the old-timer answered softly.

As the producer wrote out the check, the old-timer looked around the room for another prospect. As he took the check, he said, "Thanks a lot, sir. I really appreciate . . ." And then he fainted dead away on the floor.

The amount on the check was $10,000! And it was signed, George M. Cohan!

Dear Mr Foster:

"Here's my first order as a Community Representative! And I don't mind telling you that I'm pretty proud.

"I guess my story isn't new to you, but I thought you would like to know how I started in the subscription business.

"I *know* it costs more to keep my family going these days—I've seen prices going up in the department store where I work, and the wife makes sure I see all the bills she brings home, too.

"So when I heard about your Community Representative plan, I figured I would put my spare time to work. The result? Just look at all the enclosed orders!

"Now I plan to expand my business and to use your fine sales aids. You'll hear from me again, and with more big orders!"

Sincerely,

Elliot Marks

Washington, D. C.

Earn extra money in your own subscription business. Write today for your free Sales Kit. Address:

JAMES M. FOSTER
Coronet Subscription Agency
Dept. 252, 488 Madison Avenue
New York 22, N. Y.

months of idleness and self-pity, he set about rebuilding his life in the world of darkness.

Strelow, meanwhile, was doing the same thing. In 1936, the two men met in a state workshop for the blind and hatched their dream for a business of their own where blindness would be no handicap.

Eleven years intervened before they could do anything about it. Both got jobs in war plants, and Bauer's genius with machines enabled him to achieve an inspector's post. Their experience, and the knowledge that hundreds of other blind people were doing skilled jobs for the war effort, convinced them that a factory run by the blind could be a success.

Scraping together $600 of their own and borrowing $600 more from the Braille Institute, they rented a tiny storeroom and installed three looms. In January, 1947, they opened for business with a single employee—blind Blaine McDowell.

The partners worked 16 hours a day. "Friends said we'd be washed up in a year," Bauer recalls. Instead, by the end of the year Blind Industries needed more room.

The company now occupies 10,000 square feet in a building near busy Wilshire Boulevard. The factory looks like any small plant, except for minor concessions to the fact that most of its workers cannot see.

In place of a stairway, there is a ramp. Shipping tags are made out both in pencil and in Braille. Machines have special guards to prevent injury to the blind craftsmen who run them.

In the rug department, a row of wooden bins typifies how the partners solved tricky problems. Unable to sort one color of rug yarn from another, they used to grope their way to the street with handfuls of yarn and ask passers-by to tell them which color was which.

Now each color has a separate bin. And each is labeled in Braille.

Most blind workshops require sighted helpers to wind the looms. But Bauer has invented a special winder which the blind can operate.

The head of the rug department —William Knight—is blind. When their GI son sailed for Japan a year ago, Mrs. Knight, who is also blind, came to work as a rug tier. "Working here is the best remedy for worry," she says serenely.

Strelow and Bauer are aiming at a $500,000-a-year turnover employing 100 blind people. They feel their success is due not to public sympathy but to the fact that they produce quality merchandise in the best tradition of American competitive enterprise. The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce must have had this in mind when it said of them: "They have proved it is not necessary to have eyesight to have foresight—that ideas, wise management, and energetic labor can conquer the obstacles of darkness."

Suppose It Happened to You? (Solution to problem on page 31)

Smith took off his jacket and covered the chimney. Soon the smoke backed down into the living room below. The family came out to see what was wrong. When they saw Smith on the roof, they helped the half-frozen man down.

THE TRAFFIC COP stepped over to the woman driver he had just waved to the curb. "When I saw you coming down the street," he barked, "I said to myself, 'Fifty at least.' "

"But, officer, you're wrong," protested the lady. "This hat I'm wearing makes me look much older than I really am." —HELEN ANDREWS

BE A PATIENT pedestrian—don't be a pedestrian patient!

—*Armstrong Tire News*

TOO MUCH of this world is run on the theory that you don't need road manners if you are driving a five-ton truck. —*Katy Employees Magazine*

CHEAP CARS just don't exist any more. There are only two kinds—the expensive and the out-of-the-question. Once upon a time every American youngster dreamed of growing up to be a millionaire and owning his own car. Now he's got to make a choice. —PRISCILLA KENNETH

TODAY'S MOTORIST is a person who, after seeing an accident, drives carefully for several blocks. —*Contact*

WE ARE TOLD that the reason ministers never buy secondhand automobiles is because they don't have the vocabulary to run them.

—*Sunshine Magazine*

ASKED TO DRAW UP a list of factors contributing most to highway safety, the executive of a leading motor corporation headed his list with one word: "Courtesy."

—NEAL O'HARA (*McNaught Syndicate, Inc.*)

"BUT YOUR HONOR," protested the meek little man, "I *couldn't* have passed that red light as the officer charges."

"And why not?" inquired the magistrate.

"My wife was with me, sir, and when she's with me there's nothing can appear on the road without her telling me about it—a dog, a cat, and especially a red light. She is unquestionably the finest back-seat driver in the world—so you see, Your Honor, it couldn't possibly have happened." —PATRICIA GATELY

SMITH WAS proudly showing his new sedan to his neighbor.

"I'd driven the old car only 8,000 miles and it was still good as new," he explained. "But, of course, it was hopelessly out of date as soon as this new and improved model came out."

"How is the new model different?" asked the neighbor.

"Why, you can see it at a glance. The automatic cigarette lighter is an inch nearer the steering wheel this year." —*Swing*

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